

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5

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Paul counters false teaching that has confused the Thessalonians, namely that the Day of the Lord had come already and that they had missed Jesus's return. Paul reminds them of what he taught when he was with them: the ultimate enemy of God—the antichrist—will first declare himself to be God and seat himself in the temple in Jerusalem before Jesus returns to earth and the Day of the Lord occurs.

It appears that someone was attempting to convince the Thessalonian believers that Jesus had already returned, and that they had missed it. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul addressed the mistaken idea that if believers died before Jesus returned, they would stay dead in the ground and would not get to be with Him. To the contrary, Paul emphasized in his first letter to the Thessalonians that dead believers will be resurrected and will be first to join Jesus when He returns to meet His saints in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Notwithstanding this explanation, further confusion and anxiety about Jesus's return continues among the Thessalonians. Here Paul writes at length to undo a new false teaching they had heard *with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him*. This one concerns the *day of the Lord*, which is apparently a different future event from the one Paul spoke of in 1 Thessalonians, where believers were caught up to meet Jesus in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Paul goes over many details to help reassure them that Jesus had not in fact returned, thus they had not missed it.

Paul states: *Now we request you, brethren*. Paul begins an exhortation with a *request* and refers to the Thessalonian believers as his *brethren*. Both of these letters are written to a body of believers, to help them understand, and help them in their journey to be sanctified in Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:3). In 1 Thessalonians, Paul wrote regarding believers who had died before Jesus's return, that they would be the first to meet Jesus in the air, followed by living believers being caught up to meet Jesus. This time Paul writes *with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him* that accompanies the *day of the Lord*. Specifically, Paul exhorts his Thessalonian children in the Lord *that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come*.

It seems perhaps that someone had attempted to send a letter falsely claiming to be from Paul, as Paul asked them not to *be disturbed* by any *message* contained in a *letter as if from us*. The *us* here in the phrase *as if from us* likely refers to Paul, Silas, and Timothy, the authors of both 1st and 2nd Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1). The false claim in this errant *message* was that *the day of the Lord has come*. We are not told the motive behind someone sending a false message, but we know the opposition to Paul and his gospel message was fierce in Thessalonica. Perhaps the deceivers believed they could topple the faith of the believers by dashing their hope in Jesus's return.

At the time Paul wrote this letter, the Revelation of Jesus to the Apostle John had not yet occurred. So Paul could not reference the apocalyptic vision that the Apostle John would eventually have and would write down for our benefit (Revelation 1:1-3). Instead, Paul refers to the Old Testament book of Daniel, where much of what is in Revelation was first revealed. He finishes his explanation in 2 Thessalonians 2:5 by asking the Thessalonians, *Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?* Even in Paul's brief time with them, he was diligent to go over, in great detail, the signs of the end times, and to teach them what the prophet Daniel wrote in the Scriptures about the visions of the end times which the Lord sent him.

Paul apparently prioritized teaching the Thessalonians about Jesus's second coming. This tells us that this is something believers should have in mind constantly. It is the hope which we should anticipate. We should be eager for Christ's return. Paul does not specify whether the *coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him* refers to one event or two. In 1 Thessalonians Paul spoke of Jesus coming in the air:

"Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord"
(1 Thessalonians 4:17)

It seems likely that this catching up in the air will be a separate event from Jesus's return during the "day of the Lord," when Jesus sets foot again upon the earth. When Jesus returns to earth, He will defeat the armies of the beast, who is the antichrist, and the Mount of Olives will split in two (Revelation 19:11-21; Zechariah 14:4).

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul made clear that the dead in Christ would rise first, then those who remain would be caught up. Paul told the Thessalonians this could occur any day (1 Thessalonians 5:2). But in this letter, Paul is addressing the *day of the Lord* and making clear that this day cannot occur until the *apostasy comes*. Therefore it seems Paul is speaking of two separate events, which would help explain why the Thessalonians were still confused after receiving the explanation in 1 Thessalonians.

Paul urges that the Thessalonians *Let no one in any way deceive you*. This was a second false teaching about the end of days that he needed to address. The first was about the fate of those who died prior to Jesus's return. The second regards the *day of the Lord* when Jesus sets foot on earth and judges the world.

Paul goes over the basics of what will happen before the *day of the Lord*. Jesus can return in the air at any time, but this *day of the Lord* will not occur until certain events transpire. The *day of the Lord* is a day of God's judgment. There have been a number of events the Bible calls the day of the Lord. An example is the exile of Judah to Babylon (Joel 1:15). The final judgment will be the ultimate day of the Lord. But this day of the Lord *will not come unless the apostasy comes first*. Paul describes the *apostasy* as follows: *the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God*.

The man of lawlessness is described in Old Testament book of Daniel, as well as in the New Testament book of Revelation, where he is called the beast.

Jesus also mentioned this same *apostasy* event. This occurs in Matthew 24, when the disciples ask Jesus about the end of the age.

“And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’”
(Matthew 24:3)

Jesus then answers their questions in inverse order.

First: “What’s the sign of the end of the age?”

Second: “When will these things happen?”

- The end of the age happens when “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). This passage says that “the one who endures to the end is the one who will be saved” (Matthew 24:13). The “saved” here is to be saved from having their love grow cold, and lose their rewards (Matthew 24:12). So no matter how bad things get, we as believers must not let our love grow cold (Revelation 2:4, Ephesians 5:1-2).
- Jesus then answers the second question, “When will these things happen?” This is where Jesus quotes Daniel:

“Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.”
(Matthew 24:15-16)

What Paul refers to as *the apostasy*, Jesus refers as the “abomination of desolation.” This “abomination of desolation” will be when *the man of lawlessness is revealed*. This will be the beast, who is the antichrist. He will be *the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God*.

Jesus warns His people that those who are alive to see this event should flee, for this will “be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will” (Matthew 24:21). In fact, this time will be so bad that “Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short” (Matthew 24:22). This indicates that there will still be believers on the earth, who are elect when this occurs. This could be due at least in part to people coming to faith in Christ after believers are caught up to meet Jesus in the air.

In Daniel’s prophecy, he describes a period of seven years before God’s Messiah will establish an everlasting kingdom of everlasting righteousness. The last 3½ of these seven years will be the

“great tribulation” spoken of by Jesus. The prophet Daniel describes it as, “a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time” (Daniel 12:1). The world will suffer like never before, under the despotic rule of what Revelation calls “the beast” (Revelation 13:4-5), also known as “the antichrist.”

It should be clear that this “abomination of desolation” has not yet happened. We do not have anything in history that meets the standard of “worse than anything ever,” and the end of the age will come within 3½ years of this awful event. The “when” event is when the “abomination of desolation” is “standing in the Holy Place.”

We do not know what this abomination will look like, but it will apparently be clear when it occurs. Something like this happened already, a “birth pang” (Matthew 24:8) which points forward to the ultimate abomination. This birth pang was when Antiochus Epiphanes halted temple sacrifice to God, and put a statue of Zeus in the temple in Jerusalem in 167 B.C. It seems that the *man of lawlessness* will be a world ruler who will eliminate worship of God, and replace it with worship of a false deity. In the past the “abomination” was a physical idol. We do not know what it will be in the future. It seems likely that when this occurs, the temple will have been restored in Jerusalem, although that is not certain.

The world ruler (beast) who will perform this act of the “abomination of desolation” is who Paul is describing, the *man of lawlessness*, the antichrist declaring himself above God. Paul also calls him *the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.*

Paul and Jesus are getting this image from the 70 Weeks prophecy in Daniel 9. There the angel Gabriel is sent by God to tell Daniel:

“Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place.”
(Daniel 9:24)

At the end of this “seventy weeks” everything will be made right: sin will end, humans will be reconciled to God, righteousness will fill the earth, everything predicted in the Bible will have fully transpired and be finished, and Jesus will rule the earth.

This “seventy weeks” is literally “seventy sevens” and best interpreted as weeks of years. So 490 years is dictated. This refers to the Jews, and Jerusalem. At the end of the 490 years we will have an earth full of righteousness.

The prophetic clock starts when a proclamation is given to rebuild the wall in Jerusalem (Daniel 9:25). And it occurs in three phases, 7 weeks of years, 62 weeks of years, and 1 week of years.

After the seven weeks of years followed by the 62 weeks of years from the decree to rebuild the wall (which is a total of 69 weeks of years, $7 + 62 = 69$ years), the Messiah shall be “cut off and have nothing” (Daniel 9:26). This prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus being crucified for our sins.

There are a number of ways to count this timing from various ancient decrees, all of which end during Jesus's first advent. One of the reasons there was great anticipation at the time of Jesus was because of this prophecy, and people knew that the time was drawing near.

After the Messiah was cut off, "the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary" (Daniel 9:26). Jerusalem was besieged and the temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. Therefore the "prince who is to come" (the antichrist, the beast, *the son of destruction*) will emerge out of the remnants of the Roman Empire in some fashion, since it was "the people of the prince," the Romans, who destroyed the temple while sacking Jerusalem.

The final "week" of years is yet to come as of this writing. It is sometimes called the Seven Year Tribulation, although the Bible only states that the last 3½ years will be a time of tribulation (Matthew 24:21). The Daniel 9 clock tracking the 70 weeks of years is currently on pause. The clock was paused with the advent of Christ, likely when Jesus was crucified. The clock will begin again, and the last 7 of Daniel's 70 weeks of years will begin "ticking away" when a covenant between "he" and "the many" takes place. The "he" in Daniel 9:27 is the prince who is to come, the "antichrist," the "beast." This "beast" will make a covenant with Israel, and likely many other nations. This covenant starts the 70 week clock of Daniel 9 again, 69 weeks of which have already ticked by:

"And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week [3½ years after the clock restarts] he [the beast] will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering [religious worship is outlawed]; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate [Jesus calls this the 'abomination of desolations'], even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."
(Daniel 9:27)

Biblical Text

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,² that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.⁵ Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?